

A lethal way to 'coexist'

JOHN LOFTON

It's not often that we get to see a transcript of a *Washington Post* reporter's interview with a Communist thug.

And it's even less frequent that a reporter for a major metropolitan daily fails to report it when a foreign government official confirms the fact that his secret police are infiltrating and killing leaders of their opposition.

So, we owe a debt of gratitude to the Sandinista publication *Barricada* for printing a 14-page "special supplement," which is an interview of Nicaragua's Minister of Defense Humberto Ortega by the *Post*'s Joanne Omang.

This interview, which Ms. Omang says she felt "a little privileged" to get, was published by *Barricada* in Spanish on Oct. 10, 1985. I read an English translation of it in the Oct. 28, 1985, Foreign Broadcast Information Service report, which is published by the Central Intelligence Agency.

Now, there are several fascinating things about this conversation.

First, there is the revelation, the official confirmation, that the Sandinistas are killing, some might say murdering, some of their opposition.

In response to this question — "Are you just waiting for us to become bored with this whole situation?" — Mr. Ortega replies, in part, concerning either the so-called "contras," the freedom fighters, or the "counterrevolutionary" Miskito Indians (it is not clear):

"No. We have implemented a strategy to deal stronger blows. . . . Our strategy is not to ignore them, but rather to coexist with them. Our strategy calls for the development of various campaigns, maneuvers, and special actions, and to work to disband and infiltrate them as the Interior Ministry has done. *The Interior Ministry has infiltrated their exclusive groups and killed their leaders during special actions.*" (Emphasis mine.)

Well, now. The fact that Communists speak Orwellian double-talk fluently is not new. But to admit that killing is a part of a strategy of coexistence is rather startling. And one doesn't have to be a graduate of the

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Columbia School of Journalism to realize that such an official admission is news, big news. Or so one would think. I mean, it was big news, wasn't it, when it was discovered that the CIA had allegedly given the anti-Sandinista forces a so-called assassination manual?

So, I asked Ms. Omang if she reported this revelation, this official confirmation that the Sandinistas are killing leaders of their opposition? No, she says, she didn't. In fact, she says she didn't write any story about her Ortega interview, but she "used pieces of it in other stories."

Perhaps. But in a search of all her by-line stories since this interview, I have found none of it reported. None.

Another interesting thing about this interview is the extent to which Ms. Omang serves up a series of what are, for the most part, softball questions which Mr. Ortega, not surprisingly, belts over the left-field fence. Repeatedly, he is allowed to assert things that are not true or, at least, things that are subject to challenge, but Ms. Omang gives him no static. None.

For example, Mr. Ortega states categorically that the Sandinistas' revolutionary government has "popular support" among the people. He says the day-to-day leaders of the "contras" are the "hierarchy" of Somoza's "former National Guard." And he says the Sandinista movement is an "independent, non-aligned revolution." There is compelling evidence that all of these statements are false. But Ms. Omang confronts Mr. Ortega with none of it, not even as a devil's advocate.

Mr. Ortega also confirms that the Soviets have given them different kinds of helicopters. And he makes a not-too-subtle threat against Costa Rica. Noting that there are adventure-some, mercenary forces operating out of Costa Rica against the Sandinistas, Mr. Ortega says:

"If Costa Rica continues pursuing its current policy, what it will do is create problems for itself because in the long run it will not be able to control the forces that are roaming its territory with weapons. There are social problems in Costa Rica, and these may intensify. Elements who hate the Costa Rican regime may also emerge there. The Costa Rican left wing has been waging a civic struggle, but who can predict that it will not confront the U.S. policy in Costa Rica in some other way?"

In what way? Well, Mr. Ortega says "with weapons" possibly, adding: "To the extent that there is tol-

aggressiveness as it currently exists, the Nicaraguan government would not be very keen on persecuting any Costa Ricans wishing to come here to wage war on the Costa Rican government."

I have seen this threat reported nowhere in *The Washington Post* under Ms. Omang's by-line.

When I asked Ms. Omang why she asked no questions about the terrible state of human rights under the San-

dinistas, she said this was because the purpose of her visit was "to find out about their military situation and how they looked upon the political situation with the 'contras' and the United States."

When I asked why she reported nothing about Mr. Ortega's confirmation that they are killing the leaders of the "contras" or the "counterrevolutionary" Miskito Indians, she says she doesn't recall his saying this. I read her the relevant passage from her interview, to which she says, again, that she doesn't recall this, but, "I assume he was talking about the 'contras' in general." She adds that if

he had said they were killing Miskito leaders "this would have jumped out at me."

Fascinating. So, if Mr. Ortega was admitting to killing (murdering?) just leaders of the "contras," this is not news.

When I ask if it wasn't her role to challenge Mr. Ortega when he said things that were total garbage — things like the Sandinistas are "independent" and "non-aligned" — Ms. Omang says, "The interview speaks for itself," which it sure does. And, she says, with a laugh: "You notice I didn't write a story about this, so I didn't consider these things newsworthy. What I did consider newsworthy, I wrote about. And I recom-

mend you read what I did write."

But, as I've said, I tried, and could find nothing she wrote about this interview. Zip, zero, zilch.

When I asked Ms. Omang what she thought it said about the Sandinistas' attitude toward her interview that they chose to reprint it in a special supplement to *Barricada*, she said: "I assume it means that they thought it was an opportunity to say what they wanted to say."

Precisely. And if this isn't allowing yourself to be a "useful idiot" (Lenin's phrase), a conduit for Communist disinformation, then I don't know what is.

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